



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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23 MAR 1979

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

Release ☒ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s): B6

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to

Date ☐ Declassify on ☐ Reason

[REDACTED] (Entire Text)

TO: The Secretary

THROUGH: P - Mr. David P. Newsom

FROM: ARA - John A. Bushnell, Acting

SUBJECT: Ambassador Aja Espil Appeals for More Time to Document Argentine Human Rights Improvements

On March 21 our Executive Director in the World Bank told the Argentina representative that we plan to vote no on the railroad loan coming up next Tuesday. On February 28 Assistant Secretary Vaky told Argentine Ambassador Aja Espil that we would vote no on the next loan unless there are human rights improvements. Within a couple of hours Aja Espil asked for a meeting with me to review the situation.

Aja Espil made five points:

- He is returning to Argentina this weekend and will be meeting with President Videla and many other senior officials to stress the importance of additional movement on human rights; a switch to a no vote will greatly complicate his mission;
- Although the movement from abstain to no has no economic significance, it will immediately be a major issue in the Argentine press which, perhaps unfortunately, has been playing US-Argentine relations as greatly improved since the Mondale/Videla meeting; it will also be a big issue among the key civilian and military decision-makers in Buenos Aires, some of whom continue to argue that Videla made a major mistake in inviting the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and are looking for a peg on which to attack Videla and block needed additional movement on human rights;

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- Such a signal when the situation in Argentina is improving rapidly will play into the hands of those opposing human rights improvements and cooperation with the US on such issues as nuclear policy; it would greatly support the argument made by some in influential positions that improving relations with the US -- Videla's objective -- cannot be achieved; the US objective should be to support Videla who is committed to the changes the US wants to see;
- The human rights situation is improving rapidly (see list of evidence he cited below); there has been less than a month since Vaky informed the Argentine Government that improvements are needed to avoid a shift to no votes; he would expect to bring back more evidence of improvement when he returns in a couple of weeks; there must be basic institutional improvement such as strengthening the role of the courts and Videla's strengthening his position as precondition for improvements; it is on these preconditions that the most movement has been made recently;
- After I warned him to be prepared for a no vote on Tuesday although a final decision has not yet been made, he argued that the US should at least give him and Videla a little more time by continuing to abstain until the more important hydroelectric loan (Yacireta) comes up in another month.

The Ambassador stressed the following points as improvements which justify maintaining the abstention position:

- There have been no new disappearances reported for the months of February and March and the level for January was low.
- The Supreme Court has taken a number of decisions recently to reassert its authority and President Videla has personally pledged to encourage the return to the rule of law.
- In one decision, the Supreme Court ordered the military to return to judicial jurisdiction a

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warrant officer who had been accused of abuse of power. Army Commander Viola ordered that this ruling be respected. The Buenos Aires Herald, a long-time fearless defender of human rights, has reacted enthusiastically to these moves and said that Argentina is fast "returning to normal." The editorial is attached.

- Susana Panero, a high interest case for us, has been set free and should presently be on her way to the U.S.
- Foreign Minister Pastor told the press (reported on March 18) that Jacobo Timmerman could be freed soon. (The Embassy reported today by cable that the Foreign Ministry had explored what the U.S. reaction to this move would be. Cable is attached.)

The Ambassador particularly stressed the stopping of disappearances as a major improvement. I confirmed that we had no reports of disappearances since January. He said that should we receive any reports we should let him or his government know immediately as they want to investigate. He referred to an earlier conversation with me in which he had claimed that some disappearances are invented by opponents to the Government. He also said Videla would take action if a security force arranged disappearances against his orders.

On March 23 [] called [] B6
on me to report on his visit to Argentina and Paraguay earlier this month. I had suggested he raise the concern of the U.S. people with the Argentine human rights situation. He said he did so directly and received the most unqualified assurances of improvement. Economics Czar Martinez de Hoz told him categorically that disappearance by the security forces have been stopped.

Attachments:

1. Buenos Aires 2277
2. Buenos Aires Herald article

Drafted: ARA/ECA: CBrayshaw:mch
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